

15 YEARS TOO LONG

A FACTSHEET ON THE DEVASTATING
EFFECTS OF ISRAEL'S CLOSURE ON
THE GAZA STRIP



مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان
AL MEZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



15 Years Too Long

Factsheet

14 June 2007 – 14 June 2022

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights is an independent, non-partisan and non-governmental human rights organization established in 1999. Al Mezan is dedicated to protecting and advancing the respect of human rights, with a focus on economic, social, and cultural rights, supporting victims of violations of international law through legal initiatives, and enhancing democracy, community and citizen participation, and respect for the rule of law in Gaza as part of occupied Palestine.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

On 6 June 1967, Israeli authorities declared the Gaza Strip a closed military area pursuant to a military order that remained in effect even after the signing of the Oslo Accords. Significantly, Israeli restrictions on the Gaza Strip have begun as early as the 1990s, by means of a series of measures taken by the Israeli authorities, including reducing the fishing zone in Palestinian territorial waters, preventing Palestinian workers from Gaza from working in Israel, and imposing restrictions on the movement of Palestinians through the Erez crossing.

With the outbreak of the Al Aqsa or Second Intifada on 28 September 2000, and particularly starting on 9 October 2000, Israeli forces declared and imposed a closure on the Gaza Strip and besieged the residential areas near the then-present Israeli settlements, such as the al-Mawasi and al-Syafa areas, closed the great majority of crossings, and altered the operation of some others. Following Israel's 'disengagement' from Gaza in 2005, Israeli authorities closed the cargo section of Erez crossing and completely shut down Sufa, Karni and Nahal Oz crossings, which were replaced by Karem Abu Salem, Gaza's only commercial crossing. Also, before October 2000, the Rafah crossing—controlled by Israeli authorities until 2005—used to operate 24/7 and only closed two days a year. However, since then, the crossing has operated for a limited number of hours and for a few days a week. There have also been periods when Rafah was closed for months.

When Hamas became the governing authority in the Gaza Strip in 2007, Israeli authorities tightened pre-existing closure measures, doubled restrictions on the freedom of movement and goods, and, on 21 June 2007, suspended Gaza's Customs Code. Furthermore, on 18 September 2007, the Israeli Security Cabinet declared the Gaza Strip an 'hostile/enemy entity', thereby placing insurmountable obstacles to access to civil remedy in Israeli courts for Palestinians from Gaza.

Israel's closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip, which constitutes collective punishment, prohibited under international humanitarian law,¹ is implemented in the context of Israel's settler-colonial occupation of Palestinian territory (OPT) and its system of racial discrimination, domination, and oppression against the Palestinian people meeting the definition of apartheid under international law.

¹ ICRC, IHL Database, Customary IHL Rule 103: Collective Punishments, available at: https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule103.



During 15 years of Israeli closure and blockade on the Gaza Strip, Palestinians' freedom of movement has been severely restricted, including by creating military no-go areas or buffer zones on Palestinian land and waters known as 'access restricted areas'. In addition, since 2007, Israel has carried out four full-scale military offensives against the Gaza Strip, killing some 4,041 Palestinians, including 1,005 children and 461 women over a period of 13 years (2008-21), and destroying tens of thousands of homes, industrial and commercial facilities and infrastructure critical for the survival of the civilian population, including electricity, water and sanitation networks and roads, further deteriorating the humanitarian conditions and increasing poverty and unemployment rates. In parallel with this, the population of Gaza, which amounted to 1.5 Palestinians at the end of 2006, reached 2.1 million by the end of 2021, making the Strip one of the most densely populated areas in the world.

This fact sheet, supported by figures, presents findings and indicators showing the extent of Israeli violations over the 15 years of closure and blockade that have made the Gaza Strip unlivable for its more than two million inhabitants.

- Between 14 June 2007 and 14 June 2022, **Israeli military attacks have killed 5,418 Palestinians**, 23% of whom are children and 9% women, and injured thousands of others; destroyed 3,118 commercial facilities, 557 factories, 2,237 vehicles, and 2,755 public facilities; destroyed 12,631 residential units and partially damaged 41,780 others. In addition, Israeli authorities have tightened restrictions on the entry of construction materials into the Gaza Strip, thus preventing Palestinians from rebuilding their destroyed homes.
- Israeli forces also **employed excessive and lethal force against Palestinian children** attempting to cross the perimeter fence and killed 15 children, injured seven and arrested 204.
- Between 14 June 2007 and 14 June 2022, Israeli forces carried out limited incursions into areas near the eastern and northern perimeter fence in Palestinian territory some 872 times, flattening farmland and destroying crops. During the same period, **Israeli forces periodically targeted Palestinian agricultural workers**, killing 136. Israeli forces leveled and sprayed chemical pesticides at 33,100 donums of Palestinian farmlands.



- The **Israeli navy periodically targets Palestinian fishermen at sea** by opening fire at them, arresting them, seizing their equipment, persecuting them, and obstructing their work. Between 14 June 2007 and 14 June 2022, Al Mezan documented 2,514 violations against fishermen, resulting in seven deaths, 179 injuries and 750 arrests. The Israeli navy has also confiscated 237 fishing boats and sabotaged another 131 along with large numbers of fishing equipment and necessities.
- The **Israeli navy has repeatedly and extensively prevented Palestinian fishermen from sailing** in Palestinian territorial waters and has also repeatedly disallowed fishing activities in the permitted fishing zone.²
- Israeli authorities arbitrarily detain Palestinians seeking to cross into Israel through Erez to reach the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, or to travel abroad crossing as a means of entrapment. Between 14 June 2007 and 14 June 2022, they **arbitrarily arrested 204 Palestinians**, including 48 higher education students and employees enrolled in external training courses and colleges and 85 merchants.
- Among the restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities is a **capricious and discriminatory permit system to which all Palestinians wishing to leave Gaza** via Erez must apply. One of the most vulnerable groups affected by Israel's prohibitive and complex permit regime are medical patients. Between 2010 and February 2022, Israeli authorities either rejected or delayed 30% of patients' permit requests. In addition, Israeli authorities at Erez arrested 43 Palestinian patients with medical referrals and 28 of their companions after granting them exit permits. Al Mezan figures show that in the past 15 years, 72 patients, including ten children and 25 women, died after Israel denied or deferred their permits.
- As a result of the Israeli restrictions imposed on the Gaza Strip, **the volume of imports has dramatically dropped**. In 2005, 111,480 trucks of imported goods entered Gaza, quickly dropping to 26,838 in 2008. In 2020, 96,651 trucks of imported goods entered the Gaza Strip, which can be explained considering population growth and increased demand for services.
- The **volume of exported goods** has also **declined** after the imposition of the closure. While the Gaza Strip exported 9,319 trucks of goods in 2005, the volume of exports decreased dramatically to 33 trucks in 2008. In 2020, the Gaza Strip

² The permitted fishing zone which the Israeli navy allows Palestinian fishermen to sail in ranges between three and 15 nautical miles.



exported 3,118 truckloads of goods—which is around only one-third of the volume before the closure.³

- Since the imposition of the closure measures, Israeli authorities routinely banned the entry of fuel to Gaza's sole power plant, further **exacerbating the existing electricity crisis** and prompting people to resort to the use of candles, kerosene stoves, and power generators. This has caused many incidents of fire and generator-related accidents which only in 2012 claimed the lives of 35 people, including one woman and 28 children, and injured 36 others, including 20 children and six women.
- While Gaza's electricity needs are estimated at between 600-660 mw, the supply available is no more than 205 mw, which has led to electricity being cut off for more than 16 hours a day at specific times during the past 15 years. The power shortage crisis and Israel's ban on fuel entry have prompted many municipalities in the Gaza Strip to **pump untreated sewage into the sea, causing water pollution**. In 2021, a test carried out by Water and Environment Quality Authority showed that 75% of seawater along Gaza's coastline, which extends to about 40 km, is polluted.⁴
- Gaza residents are also experiencing a **serious crisis regarding the lack of safe drinking water**. Relevant authorities say that 96.2% of the water extracted from Gaza's aquifers does not meet the World Health Organization's water quality standards, especially in terms of nitrate concentration.⁵ Between 14 June 2007 and 14 June 2022, Israeli forces attacked and either destroyed or damaged 292 water wells used for both domestic use and farmlands.
- The **living conditions of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have deteriorated significantly**: in 2021, the poverty and unemployment rates stood at 53% and 47 %, respectively, while the food insecurity rate was 64%.
- The education sector has also been affected due to the prolonged closure of the Gaza Strip. Between 14 June 2007 and 14 June 2022, **Israeli forces destroyed 536 schools and 32 university buildings** and at the same time hindered the construction of new education facilities, thus causing overcrowding of students in schools. Today the average class size in an UNRWA school is 41 students compared to 39

³ Unpublished data from the Palestinian Trade Center accessed by Al Mezan on 5 June 2022.

⁴ See Al Mezan's Annual Report on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Gaza Strip in 2021 at <http://www.mezan.org/post/32937> (, available in Arabic only).

⁵ The Palestinian Water Authority, unpublished Report on Water sources in the Gaza Strip in 2021.



in public schools.⁶ Many educational facilities remain inappropriate for students with disability.

- The realization of cultural rights in the Gaza Strip is declining, mainly because Israeli-imposed restrictions have precluded the reconstruction of libraries and cultural institutions destroyed during Israeli military attacks, including the national library. The tightening restrictions have also increased the difficulties in developing and updating the library's book and periodical holdings and in organizing book exhibitions involving outside publishers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the Israeli government purports to justify the closure and related restrictions under the guise of “security”, these policies demonstrate Israel’s intent to separate and divide Palestinians and re-engineer the demographics of the entire Palestinian population to assert its domination over them. Notably, this fact sheet considered several violations of international law perpetrated by Israeli authorities within the context of its sustained closure and blockade, including the use of excessive force and recurrent military targeting of civilians and civilian homes, killing thousands; arbitrary arrest and detention of children, patients, fishermen, and other vulnerable groups; and the deliberate imposition on Palestinians in Gaza of inadequate living conditions. As highlighted by Al Mezan in its report [‘The Gaza Bantustan – Israeli Apartheid in the Gaza Strip’](#), these inhumane acts meet the definition of the crime against humanity of apartheid under both the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid and the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Accordingly, on this grim fifteenth anniversary, Al Mezan reiterates its call on the international community to uphold its moral and legal obligations toward the Palestinian people by urging Israel to immediately, fully, and unconditionally lift its closure and blockade and end all associated unlawful restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods to and from the Gaza Strip and to ensure accountability and justice for widespread, gross, and systemic violations against the Palestinian people, including for the crime of apartheid.

⁶ Palestinian Ministry of Education, Statistical Yearbook, February 2022, Gaza. [annual statistical book high 2022 2021.pdf \(mohe.ps\)](#) (available in Arabic only).